

To: Mayor Chuck Reed  
From: Environmental Subcommittee, Mayor Reed Transition Committee  
Date: January 8, 2007  
Subject: Final Recommendations

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**Committee Members:**

Judy Stabile, Chair  
Craig Breon  
Janet Gray Hayes  
Alicia Lanier  
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**Recommendations:**

Create a Council Committee on Environment, Parks and Open Space. Some of the initial tasks for this Committee will include, but are not limited to the following:

- Create a “walking distance standard” for parks to measure how well the city’s neighborhoods are served by existing parks. The City should use this performance measure to prioritize new locations for parks to underserved neighborhoods and to coordinate with regional bodies to secure funding for new parks.
- Oversee a feasibility study and the implementation of a pilot solar power project, in partnership with local solar power companies, where solar panels would be placed on city facilities including, but not limited to, parking garages, City Hall, and the public arts buildings.
- Supervise the development of a program for acquainting all developers (including home owners) with green building techniques and their advantages. Examine possible incentives for the City to encourage Green Building. The City should require a green building report to be filed by all developers (including home owners). This report should be simple and would merely ask what green building techniques would be used in each development.
- Oversee and coordinate grant writing for parks, trails, open space and other environmental projects.
- Create a program to address street tree replacement and tree canopy coverage.

- Analyze the environmental impacts of major events and functions before agreeing to participate.
- In general this Committee would also preside over issues regarding: air and water quality, water treatment and water recycling, solid waste recycling and landfills, habitat preservation, parks and trail completion, park distribution equity, open space protection, green building programs, and any additional environmental projects.

The City needs to begin a new General Plan Review as soon as possible. Concerns and recommendations from the committee include:

- The Council should not give final approval to any large Specific Area plans until the General Plan Review is completed.
- General Plan Amendments should only occur once a year.
- The Mayor and Council should support the current Urban Growth Boundary and seek opportunities to protect land outside the current boundary. Any proposal that includes opens space encroachment or urban service boundary expansion should be referred to the Environment Committee for additional review.
- The Mayor and Council need to strictly enforce the restrictions on hillside development above the 15% slope line. Any proposal that includes hillside development above the 15% slope line should be referred to the Environment Committee for additional review.
- The City should examine areas outside the Urban Services Boundary for rezoning to conform to the General Plan for open space protection.
- The Mayor and Council should fully engage the City's Planning and Environmental staff and take advantage of their expertise and creativity when conducting the Review of the General Plan.

## **Background**

The San José Council Environment Committee was created in June 1986. In the following years, San José rose to national prominence for its environmental programs. In January 1995, the Committee was merged with the Transportation & Development Committee to become the Environment & Transportation Committee. It focused mostly on Transportation issues, with time reserved on the agenda for Environmental issues. In 1999, Environment was removed from the title and it reverted to being the Transportation & Development Committee. The Mayor declared that environmental issues were too important and needed to be reviewed by the entire Council. Now most environmental issues are heard by the full Council, where they are heard under strict time constraints. The result has been a dwindling of momentum and performance in environmental areas.

Prior to 2001, San José conducted a General Plan annual review in the fall of each year. Since 2001, up to four General Plan reviews have been conducted per year. The shift in policy was made in response to a recommendation from the Mayor's Housing Production Team in November 2001. While the change in policy made the General Plan more flexible, it also resulted in a diversion of staff time to conduct the frequent reviews rather than implement the General Plan. It also made it more difficult for Council to fully appreciate the cumulative effects of General Plan decisions.